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13 November 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable William P. Rogers } 11-2-144
The Secretary of State } 11-8-153
The Honorable Melvin R. Laird } 11-2-146
The Secretary of Defense } 11-8-151
The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger } 11-3-145
Assistant to the President for } 11-8-152
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Soviet Military Estimates

1. For some time I have felt that we should re-examine the form and content of the major National Intelligence Estimates on Soviet military subjects. These papers took on substantially their present form nearly a decade ago in response to the expressed or implied needs not only of highest-level policy-makers but of military planners as well. We wish to make sure that they are made as responsive as possible to today's needs.

2. Each year these Estimates, published in the fall, examine in considerable detail a broad range of questions -- from the goals of Soviet strategic policy to the number of helicopters in Soviet Naval Aviation -- and offer the judgments of the intelligence community on all these matters. Some of the subjects covered are complex and controversial; some are simple, or at least undisputed; some appear almost without change from one year to the next. The problem of arranging and structuring all this material is difficult.

3. It would be most helpful if you could give me your views or suggestions as to the manner in which these papers might be made most useful to you. Some of the questions going through our minds, together with notes pertinent to these questions, are outlined in the attachment. I also enclose copies of the two most recently issued Estimates on Soviet military capabilities, to remind you of how these papers are presently structured. Before embarking on the lengthy process leading up to next year's editions, I should be most grateful for any guidance you can give us on this matter.

Richard Helms

Attachments - 3

- 1) Questions
- 2) NIE No. 11-3-69
- 3) NIE No. 11-8-69

Abbot Smith/Richard Helms:ecd - 13/11/69

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1 - Mr. A. Smith, WASH

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Considerations on the Structure and Content
of Estimates of Soviet Military Forces

1. Is the present division of the subject matter into three papers covering the military missions -- Strategic Attack (11-8), Strategic Defense (11-3), and General Purpose Forces (11-14) -- the most relevant and useful way of meeting the needs of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs?

NOTE: This arrangement was developed to parallel the way

United States military program planning has been done in recent years. In this connection, we note that the tentative format for the Department of Defense Five Year Force and the Program Plan (circulated by Dr. Kissinger on 31 October 1969) continues to structure United States forces by mission, as well as by Service and Defense agency. For this reason, the present approach to Soviet forces may continue to be useful for threat evaluation and for comparisons of United States and Soviet forces and military R&D efforts.

2. Is the amount of detail presented in these estimates excessive? Assuming it is necessary for the military planner, is it also necessary for top policy makers? Should we issue different types of estimates for different readers?

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NOTE: The three major Soviet military estimates present a considerable amount of descriptive information on individual weapons and forces on which there is essential agreement within the intelligence community. These details provide the analytical foundation for intelligence judgments on Soviet capabilities and objectives made in the estimates. They are, of course, vital to the total estimative process, but we have some question whether they are all needed for the highest-level users of these NIEs.

3. Do present procedures adequately provide the chief users of these estimates with the intelligence judgments of most vital interest to them and with adequate indication of the evidence or argument on which these judgments rest? Do present procedures adequately help the principal users to understand differences of view within the intelligence community and the reasons for the differences?

NOTE: The three major Soviet military estimates are now produced on a yearly basis, usually in the fall of the year. This annual cycle of production, together with the compendious nature of the estimates, tends to cause the major issues to be intermixed with matters that may be of no particular moment so far as current problems important to the Secretaries are concerned. Moreover, the large number

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of separate judgments in each paper makes it impossible to set forth adequately the considerations lying behind each one; selectivity in this matter would be inescapable.